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ABSTRACT

An approach is described for developing the language of limited English proficient (LEP) students using process writing with content drawn from across the curriculum. This is proposed in the context of recent research in second language reading that has focused on developing metacognitive awareness and use of reading strategies, and that less proficient learners may improve their skills through training in those strategies demonstrated by more successful learners. A narrative of in-class experiences with LEP students ages 8 to 12 years over 18 months traces the development of learners and their teacher in a collaborative decision-making process. The approach allowed the LEP students to see themselves as authors and to respond to each other's work. Examples of student writing about personal experiences are included. Contains 6 references. (LB)

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Geodes Like Sky Blue Popsicles: Developing Authorship Literacy in Limited English Proficient Students

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Recent research in second language reading has focused on developing metacognitive awareness and use of reading strategies. Strategy research in reading argues that less proficient learners may improve their skills through training in those strategies demonstrated by more successful learners. This suggests that writing strategies demonstrated by more successful learners could also be taught. The following article describes an approach to developing the language of Limited English Proficient students using process writing with content drawn from across the curriculum. A narrative of in-class experiences with LEP students ages eight to twelve years over eighteen months traces the development of learners and their teacher in a collaborative decision-making process.

Elementary school children acquiring English proficiency as young second language learners have been given a range of options in their oral language production. It has been expected that these children will move from receptive listening to physical responses before oral language production. Their speech often begins with one or two word statements with increasing command of longer meaning units such as phrases, sentences, questions, and narrative prose (Krashen, 1981a, 1981b; Tarone, 1988; Wells & Robinson, 1982). All speech attempts by the limited English proficient learners are rewarded with encouragement and continued modeling by the English as a second language teacher.

However, if you look at the writing opportunities presented in elementary school curriculum, it is clear that the process of learning to write is not seen as a natural one. In elementary schools, frequent opportunities to write rarely extend beyond the sentence level of mechanistic linguistic skills, such as grammar drills and spelling tests, yet schools claim to teach communication skills (Heath & Branscombe, 1985). Indeed, writing activities in many language arts textbooks focus on identification of parts of speech, figurative images or verb tenses

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(Graves, 1983). Once identified these words are numbered in a notebook. Academic discourse forms which lie at the heart of success in the higher levels of schooling—oral and written extended prose, sequenced explanations, and logical arguments—rarely receive explicit identification and discussion at the elementary level (Heath & Branscombe, 1985).

As the LEP students become more proficient in English, it becomes more obvious that they strongly believe that economy of expression in *written* English is adequate. Terse sentences using simple subject-verb sentence structure handle the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and many children's games:

Give candy
I like apple.
I want juice.
I no want milk.

I go in now.
Rain come.
I no like wet.
I want warm.

I find jacket red.
I wear mittens.
I run in my sneakers.
I carry backpack.

You run.
I pla, okay?
You like? I like, okay.
Go, go, go . . . We WIN!

These notions become reinforced through traditional language arts activities which generate phrasal answers on worksheets (Graves, 1983). Yet, these same children often run out of time in their *oral* conversations about families, gardening, monsters and practical jokes. Two recent conversations illustrate oral communicative skills of elementary LEP children:

A. 1: I have three sisters and six brothers.
2: You have that many. You have a BIG family.
3: I have ten kids in my family. I can't count how many brothers and sisters. I have too many. They tell me what to do every day.
4: I have a little brother. I tell him what to do.
3: He listen? I don't listen to my sister Pang and she hit me. She mean.
4: He listens. If he doesn't, I don't play with him when my grandmother babysit us.
2: My mom yells at me when I make a mess in the kitchen.
1: My big sister slaps me and pulls my hair when I read and make mistakes.
2: My baby (brother) pulls my hair, but he's nice.

B. 1: We have a garden. It big.
2: Me, too.
3: My gramma has garden. I help her sometimes. I cut (week) plants.

4: My mom grow cucumber, tomato, corn, pumpkin, onion, and lettuce.
3: I like cucumber and pumpkin.
1: I eat cucumber and cut pumpkin Halloween make scare face.
2: We have many pumpkin and cut big scare face.
4: You like cut pumpkin scare face?

It is difficult to believe that these same children stop writing after a few sentences because they have nothing more to express in their writing. Perhaps we as teachers have communicated that we care more about what we have to say to our students than we care about providing opportunities to help them discover and refine who they are. After all, young children try to write or draw on walls, tables, books, and even newspapers long before they enter elementary school. They continually find ways to assert "I am."

LEP students need to discover connections between their own knowledge and experiences and writing. Good questions reflecting on and responding to the children's writing helps them express information they did not know they possessed. The LEP students need to have rich imaginative prose from literature with syntactical forms they recognize. They need opportunities to take risks with writing that emphasizes ideas and vocabulary before spelling and punctuation so that students' ideas may develop to th writers' satisfaction. Then the final revision may be polished with spelling, capitalization, and punctuation changes. LEP students need to create their own meaning and voice through personalized language combinations, or metaphor-making such as was encouraged by the COMPAS Dialogue program.

COMPAS DIALOGUE

During 1988-1990 Mary Kay Rummel and Lisa Boehlke collaborated in *Dialogue*, a writing program co-sponsored by Community Programs for the Arts and Sciences (COMPAS) and the St. Paul Public Schools. COMPAS is Minnesota's largest community arts agency. Since 1974, it has provided experiences in the arts to people who would otherwise not have had them. Each year, in Writers-and-Artists-in-the-Schools, community mural projects, dance groups, theater productions, and musical performances, COMPAS has reached more than 160,000 people through its belief that we create for ourselves a richer community by participating in the arts (*Dialogue Newsletter*, 1988).

The COMPAS Dialogue program was a three-year initiative (1986-1989) to improve the teaching of writing in the St. Paul Public Schools. The program was designed to help teachers develop new skills and ideas for using writing as a teaching tool, and encouraged teachers to become familiar with the writing process through their own writing. By its third year, COMPAS Dialogue had worked with over two-hundred teachers in twenty-eight St. Paul Public Schools.

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Funding for the program came from the Rockefeller Foundation, the St. Paul Foundation, the Knight Foundation, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press/Dispatch*, the Matsushita Foundation, the Minnesota State Arts Board, the Minnesota Academic Excellence Foundation, and the St. Paul Public Schools.

The COMPAS Dialogue program was founded on three beliefs:

1. Professional writers provide powerful models for authorship.

2. By engaging in the writing process, teachers can gain insight into authorship literacy.

3. It takes time and close collaboration if teachers and their students are to understand this new kind of literacy in which the students take charge of writing and give a personal shape to materials of memory or history.

Rummel and Boehlke met at the fall 1988 COMPAS Dialogue Institute which provided teachers an overview of concepts and approaches to writing. Later, Rummel wrote with teachers to demonstrate how professional writers alter their own compositions. Central was the belief that ideas are redefined as written pieces and are examined for reflection of the author's intention. Additional details are added to the written pieces as the author clarifies his/her own voice. It is this process of reflection which creates the writing strategies of authorship literacy (Wolf, 1987).

Rummel guided both teachers and students in the writing process at Chelsea Heights Elementary School in an extended six-week residency during the 1988-1989 academic year. During her residency, she demonstrated authorship literacy with participating COMPAS Dialogue classes. Both students and teachers practiced authorship literacy with their own writing during the three-week intervals before Rummel returned to Chelsea Heights. Although Rummel was physically absent from Chelsea Heights during these intervals, she made herself available to discuss difficulties that teachers and students may have had with the writing process. Her availability and cheerful encouragement for the teachers and students engaged in authorship literacy continued at more infrequent intervals for part of the 1989-1990 academic year with COMPAS Dialogue funding.

AUTHORSHIP LITERACY: THE PLAN

Many details that are used in writing are generated before a first draft (Graves, 1983), so we used semantic mapping, a term which "embraces a variety of strategies designed to display graphically information within categories related to a central concept" (Johnson, in the foreward to Heimlich & Pittelman, 1986, p. v). Categories or associations were indicated visually in a diagram or map.

The procedure generally began with a brainstorming session in which Rummel or Boehlke facilitated student associations on a topic or key concepts into categories in the form of a map. As the students contributed to the brainstorming procedure and built on each other's associations, they became better able to focus on what they knew. It is in the process of naming and contrasting that children become more explicit in stating what they know as earlier examples of children's conversations about simple need indicated. We helped them collect details related to personal history as well as to science content material (Ellis, et al., 1989). We also led them to help each other become more detailed in their language use. In this article, we will describe three of these writing projects and discuss examples of the student writing that resulted. We began with autobiography and personal description in order to help students tap the rich resources of personal history.

PERSONAL HISTORY: HOUSES

1. Students created a semantic map of details about their homes in response to the questions:

Where do you live?

How long have you lived there?

What does your house look like?

What colors and materials (wood, brick, or concrete) does your house have?

Which smells make you think of your home?

Which room do you like the best?

Why do you like that room the best?

They started by writing their addresses in the center of the paper, then drew lines off from the central information and filled the lines with physical details as well as memories in order to respond to the above questions.

2. After all students finished drawing their semantic maps about their homes, they shared them orally. Students responded to the presenter by telling which part they liked.

3. Students then wrote short descriptions and personal experiences about their homes. As each one shared what had just been written, the other students told the author what information he/she would need in order to better understand the meaning of the written piece. Each student author chose which questions from the group to answer by adding more details to the written piece. At first Souad (Grade 4) wrote:

> *In my kitchen there is a microwave, stove, walls, sink, tables and a floor with pictures with squares. I have white cupboards. The cupboards are down low. Some are up high.*

After questions and discussion she changed the above writing to:

> *In my kitchen there is a old dusty microwave and an old white stove. The walls are a clean white. There is a gray sink and little tables and a floor with pictures and dirty with squares...*

PERSONAL HISTORY: SELF

The need to add detail causes students to write longer, more varied sentences. Since their control of English syntactical patterns was limited and verb tenses often inappropriate, we added models from children's literature to further develop skills in autobiographical writing (Ellis, et al, 1989).

1. First, students listened to sections from the memoir, *When I Was Young in the Mountains*, by Cynthia Rylant (1982).

2. Then they wrote about personal experiences based on a model from Rylant such as the following:

> *When I was young in the mountains, Grandfather came home in the evening covered with the black dust of a coal mine. Only his lips were clean and he used them to kiss the top of my head.*

Two students quickly wrote:

> *When I was young in Sudan Winkel came home in the evening covered with dust. Only his kilt was clean and he used it to wear for the day.* (Filmon-Grade 5)

When I was young in the city my friend Nick and I would go to Como Pool and we both were carrying towels, shorts and goggles. It was cold but we jumped in anyways. Afterwards, when we came home, we would play nintendo. (Fanglay-Grade 4)

By grabbing their ideas and writing quickly, Filmon and Fanglay inspired the other students in their LEP pullout group to comment about their ideas and demonstrated far better than a teacher could have that ideas may flow from thought to written expression.

3. Students wrote pieces based on Rylant's childhood activities for several days, then chose a favorite to share with the group. "Picture" words and phrases were identified by the students in each other's writing. Individuals then used a student thesaurus to find synonyms that might be even more specific. Alauddin (Grade 4) made the following language changes in his story:

Before: *When I was young in the city I* went *to the pool across from my house* with *my towel. The swimming pool was cold and deep and I would sometimes see girls. I would whistle.* (Alauddin)

After: *When I was young in the city I* walked *to the pool across from my house* carrying *my towel. The swimming pool was cold and deep and I would sometimes see girls. I would whistle.* (Alauddin)

Both Alauddin and Tou read possibilities aloud to a friend and argued about word choice. They stated they had chosen the words they had for their second pieces because the "first words were too big and made too many pictures when somebody read it."

SCIENCE: CRYSTALS

Early in the collaboration we introduced the LEP students to the strategy of sensory listing based on observation of concrete objects and then practiced metaphor making with those same objects. The science curriculum has ample opportunities for observation, identification, description, recorded information, and classification. During January 1990, the intermediate LEP students (Grades 3-4) grew crystals on charcoal briquettes or sponges using salt, laundry bluing, water, household ammonia and food coloring. Another group of fifth and sixth graders even dissolved copper sulfate in water over a hot plate to make walnut

shell geodes.

1. After watching the crystals grow over a period of a week, the students brainstormed sensory descriptions especially those of sight, smell and touch and put them on a chart under sensory headings.

2. They next listened to the poem "Icicles" by Barbara Juster Espensen (1984) to examine the surprising turns ordinary objects take with similes and metaphors.

3. Teacher questions asked for answers from the sensory description chart:

Have you ever smelled . . . ?
Have you ever looked at . . . ?
Have you ever wondered . . . ?

The group effort "Snowflakes in Heaven" responded to the above questions with the structure of "Icicles."

SNOWFLAKES IN HEAVEN
Have you ever looked at
colorful
from food coloring?
Have you ever smelled
jelly beans
in charcoal
like mushroom flowers?
Have you ever wondered
if charcoal mushroom flowers
could march through the streets?
The crystal light travels
on heaven.

by Alauddin, Yang Shia, Fanglay and Souad

4. Improbable juxtapositions were set up by Rummel or Boehlke to create surprising images:

How would you introduce yourself to crystals?
How would you tell others about yourself if you were a crystal?
What do crystals eat?
Where do crystals go for fun?
What do crystals wear?

As the students responded to the improbably juxtapositions, all could participate at their comfort level of language fluency. More important than this, however, is the phenomenal delight the LEP students shared as they amazed themselves with their creations.

I AM A CRYSTAL
growing like Paul Bunyan.
I smell terrible
so I have to go swimming.
Everybody likes flower me
because I am a great artist.
Different colors -
blue, yellow, red, pink, purple.

by Josh, Mang, Alex, and Wa Men

GEODES LIKE SKY BLUE POPSICLES
cups with baby blue water
swimming in a life vest
swimming with a bikini bathing suit
swimming with a blood red popsicle
Chatter, whisper, robot talk
Let's go to the 1990's
old fashioned video arcade
forever
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
Willow
Healthy Junk Food
chocolate spinach pudding
pizza
vanilla with chocolate sauce and
chunky nuts
cold fish fin potato chips
cinnamon french fries
vinegar chocolate ice cream
We eat our friends!

by Filmon, Tou and Thai

Literature has played a vital role in all these writing process activities. Reading and responding to or reflecting upon literature is vital to being able to write it. When encouraged to write using a process approach the LEP students we taught came to see themselves as real authors who create literary pieces similar to the manner in which authors familiar to the children do (Hudelson, 1988). It established for us that the LEP children we guided had acquired new eyes and ears for imaginative imagery. They had successfully played with language and learned to respond to each other's work with interest and specific assistance.

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